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ABSTRACT

Dropping out of school has long-term financial and social costs for children and society. This bulletin describes promising new efforts across the country to reduce the number of juveniles who leave school prematurely and who are at risk of delinquency because they are truants or dropouts, afraid to attend schools, suspended or expelled, or in transition from the juvenile justice system to their school. The bulletin summarizes the problems and corresponding approaches for dealing with fearful students, truants, suspended and expelled students, students reintegrating into schools from the juvenile justice system, and dropouts. A list of publications available from the U.S. Department of Education and from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (Contains 19 endnotes.) (LMI)

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Reaching Out to Youth Out of the Education Mainstream

Sarah Ingersoll and Donni LeBoeuf

This Bulletin introduces a series of OJJDP Bulletins focusing on both promising and effective programs and innovative strategies to reach Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM). YOEM is a joint program initiative of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education, to address the needs of youth who do not attend school regularly because they are truants or dropouts, afraid to attend school, suspended or expelled, or in need of help to be reintegrated into mainstream schools from juvenile detention and correctional settings. Additional Bulletins will focus on each of these five separate but often related categories of problems that put youth at risk of falling out of the education mainstream.

Ensuring that children attend school, are safe, and receive a sound education has become a challenging task for parents and society in general. With some students, the challenge is simply to get them to come to school and stay in school. In 1994 courts formally processed approximately 36,400 truancy cases, a 38-percent increase since 1989 and a 67-percent increase since 1985.[1] In 1993, among 16- to 24-year-olds, approximately 3.4 million (11 percent of all persons in this age group) had not completed high school and were not currently enrolled in school.[2]

In many schools, crime and fear of crime are interfering with the education process. Students are concerned about crime in their neighborhoods and schools—with one in five African American and Hispanic teens indicating that crime or the threat of crime has caused him or her to stay home from school or cut class.[3] The increase in disruptive and violent behaviors and weapons possession in schools has been accompanied by a proportionate increase in suspensions and expulsions.[4]

The costs of these problems, both for children and for society, are prohibitively high. Children who are not educated will more than likely lack adequate skills to secure employment and become self-sufficient adults. In 1993 approximately 63 percent of high school dropouts were unemployed.[5] When they are employed, high school dropouts are often on the low end of the pay scale without employee benefits or job security. Over their lifetimes, high school dropouts will earn significantly less than high school graduates and less than half of what college graduates are likely to make in their lifetimes.[6] Similarly, dropouts experience more unemployment during their work careers and are more likely to end up on welfare.[7] Many dropouts struggle to maintain a minimum standard of living, often requiring welfare system support. Indeed, individuals who do not receive a basic

From the Administrator

In our technologically sophisticated world, education is now, more than ever, the essential ingredient for producing self-sufficient citizens. Unfortunately, the truth of this statement is lost on millions of students who drop out of school or who are chronic truants. However, there is no avoiding this real life lesson, which too many dropouts learn too late. Without basic education skills, individuals are severely handicapped in their search for decent jobs and a fulfilling life.

This Nation cannot afford to lose the potential of any of its people, and no community can be sanguine about the long-term financial and social costs that are associated with school failure. This Bulletin describes a new effort to reduce the number of juveniles who leave school prematurely and who are at risk of delinquency because they are truants or dropouts, afraid to attend school, suspended or expelled, or in need of help to be reintegrated into their mainstream school from the juvenile justice system. Sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, the Youth Out of the Education Mainstream initiative also seeks to raise public awareness of this problem and the need for programs to help at-risk youth continue their education and become contributing members of society.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

education must overcome tremendous barriers to achieve financial success in life or even meet their basic needs.

In addition to harming their chances of future success, children who are not attending school regularly or who drop out can pose significant problems for school administrators, police officers, juvenile court judges, probation officers, and the public. Many youth who are habitually truant and experience school failure are the same youth who bring weapons to school, bully or threaten their classmates, or regularly disrupt the school's learning environment. When they are not in school, truants and dropouts may be engaging in delinquent behavior. Research has demonstrated that youth who are not in school and not in the labor force are at high risk of delinquency and crime.[9] In Milwaukee, for example, prior to the introduction of the Truancy Abatement/Burglary Suppression Program (TABS), truants were responsible for a significant number of daytime violent crimes. With the inception of TABS, significant reductions occurred in the area of violent crime. In 1993–94, during scheduled school days, homicides were down 43 percent, sexual assaults were down 24 percent, aggravated assaults were down 24 percent, and robberies were down 16 percent. In 1994–95 daytime crime declined even further in all areas except homicide.[10]

Society pays a high price for children's school failure. An estimated 34 percent of inmates in 1991 and 29 percent in 1986 had completed high school.[11] In 1993, 17 percent of youth under age 18 entering adult prisons had not completed grade school (eighth grade or less). One-fourth had completed 10th grade, and 2 percent had completed high school or had a general equivalency diploma.[12] Each year's class of dropouts costs the Nation more than $240 billion in lost earnings and foregone taxes over their lifetimes. Billions more will be spent on crime control (including law enforcement and prison programs), welfare, healthcare, and other social services.[13] The staggering economic and social costs of providing for the increasing population of youth who are at risk of leaving or who have left the education mainstream are an intolerable drain on the resources of Federal, State, and local governments and the private sector.

Youth Out of the Education Mainstream Initiative

Educators, government officials, youth-serving professionals, law enforcement officials, and parents are calling for policies and program interventions that will effectively manage and serve youth who have fallen—or are in danger of falling—out of the education mainstream. States are enacting legislation to deal with school dropouts and with issues of suspension, school safety, and truancy.[14]

The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education have developed a joint initiative, Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM). This initiative, funded through Pepperdine University's National School Safety Center (NSSC) at Westlake Village, California, is designed to address the needs of youth who are truant, who have dropped out, who have been suspended or expelled from school, who are afraid to go to school because of violence or fear of violence, or who need to be reintegrated into school from a juvenile justice system setting. The YOEM initiative consists of sharing information through regional meetings, providing intensive training and technical assistance to 10 demonstration sites, and disseminating resource documents to support communities working to help young people avoid the school-related risks that can seriously damage their life chances and lead to delinquent behavior.

The three goals of the YOEM initiative are:

- To reduce the number of youth who are in danger of leaving or who have left the education mainstream.
- To reduce the number of youth at risk of delinquency because of truancy, dropping out of school, suspension or expulsion, lack of a safe school environment, or lack of reintegration services from juvenile justice system settings into the mainstream school.
- To heighten awareness of the growing problem of youth out of the education mainstream and of the need for prevention and intervention programs that address risk and protective factors (that is, negative and positive influences) in the lives of these youth, so they can continue their education and work to achieve their full potential as contributing members of society.

YOEM fosters a new way of doing business—the business of educating, enforcing the law, ensuring justice, providing social services and supports, and even of being a parent. The present system often fragments services to children and families or burdens schools with the task of remedying societal ills. YOEM will help communities work together more effectively and more efficiently to address these issues. It is designed to empower local community partnerships with ideas and strategies that have shown promise. Working within these partnerships, individuals and organizations must make a commitment to achieving a long-term reduction in the number of youth who leave the education mainstream.

Causes and Solutions

Two broad, common influences—school and community/home, each with its own risk factors—underlie the reasons that youth end up outside the education mainstream.[15]

- *Factors related to school.* These include lack of motivation that results from poor academic performance, such as low reading and math scores and failure to keep pace with other students in lessons or promotions; low self-esteem resulting from classification as one who is verbally deficient or a slow learner; lack of personal and educational goals due to absence of stimulating academic challenges; and teacher neglect and lack of respect for students.
- *Factors related to the community and home.* These risk factors include negative role models exemplified by friends

> "Both school performance, whether measured by reading achievement or teacher-rated reading performance, and retention in grade relate to delinquency. . . . The relationship between reading performance and delinquency appears even for first graders. Likewise, retention in grade associates with delinquency even for first graders."
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> R. Loeber et al., *Urban Delinquency and Substance Abuse: Initial Findings* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 1994), 15.

who are chronically truant or absent from school; pressures related to family health or financial concerns; difficulty coping with teen pregnancy, marriage, or parenthood; lack of family support and motivation for education in general; and violence in or near youth's homes or schools.

The YOEM initiative assists communities to formulate collaborative prevention and intervention programs and services for these young people that will help to keep them in school.

- *Prevention programs.* These help mainstream schools create a peaceful learning environment where youth feel welcome and attend classes knowing that their academic, social, and physical and mental health needs will be met in a safe, secure, and nurturing environment. Prevention strategies may include in-school suspensions, school safety plans, school resource officers, mentoring, school-to-work support, peer mediation and conflict resolution, peer tutoring, professional and career academies, and afterschool activities. When at-risk youth have these kinds of support, the educational quality and school climate improve for all children and the professionals who serve them.
- *Intervention activities and programs.* These focus on responding effectively to school violence, truancy, student suspensions and expulsions, and juvenile justice system involvement. Intervention strategies may include school peace officers; reintegration approaches; alternative schools; individual and family counseling; teen courts; in-school suspension; school-based probation officers; and gang prevention and intervention programs.

Both prevention and intervention strategies recognize that the vast majority of children have the ability to achieve and learn academic, personal, and social skills that will help them become self-sufficient and productive adults. Young people can succeed when they are provided with needed academic skills, attention, supervision, encouragement, and support. The following sections present brief synopses of the problems confronting each of the five categories of youth addressed by the YOEM initiative. After each problem summary, promising prevention and intervention approaches are presented.

Fearful Students

Problem Summary

Many students are genuinely afraid to attend school. In 1991 approximately 56 percent of juvenile victimization happened in school or on school property; 72 percent of personal thefts from juvenile victims occurred in school; and 23 percent of violent juvenile victimization occurred in school or on school property.[15]

In a 1993 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study, one in seven male students in grades 9 through 12 reported having carried a gun within the past 30 days.[16] Another 1993 poll found this to be consistent across grades. Of 2,500 students surveyed from 96 elementary, middle, and senior high schools nationwide, 15 percent reported they had carried a handgun on their person within the previous 30 days, 4 percent said that they had taken a handgun to school during the previous year, and 22 percent said that they felt safer having a handgun on their person if they were going to be in a physical confrontation.[17] According to a report by the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, in the 4 years between 1986 and 1990, there were 71 handgun-related deaths and 201 woundings at schools across the Nation.[18]

Many students bring weapons to school because of the proliferation of gangs, drug activity, and other students carrying weapons. The upward trend of juvenile violence and victimization can create a climate of fear that pervades the school setting. Parents fear for their children's safety going to and from school, and children are often apprehensive at school from fear of bullying or threats of violence. In 1993 more than half of a nationally representative sample of 6th through 12th grade students were aware of incidents of bullying with 42 percent having witnessed bullying.[19]

In a 1995 survey of 2,023 students in grades 7 through 12, almost half stated that they had changed their behavior as a result of crime or the threat of crime. For example, to protect themselves, one in eight has carried weapons, and one in nine has stayed home from school or cut class. Students in at-risk neighborhoods were four times as likely to have carried weapons, stayed home from school, or cut class to protect themselves.[20] A 1993 survey by *USA WEEKEND*, based on mail-in responses of 65,193 students in grades 6 to 12, reported that 37 percent of students did not feel safe in school and 50 percent knew someone who switched schools to feel safer. Of those responding to the survey, 43 percent avoided school restrooms, 20 percent avoided school hallways, and 45 percent avoided school grounds in general.[21]

Promising Approaches

Various types of partnerships between school officials and law enforcement officers have addressed the problem of youth who are afraid to leave their homes or go to school because of violence, bullying, or gang activities.

Improving the School Atmosphere. Some approaches focus on improvements in the school atmosphere by:

- Formulating school security plans and establishing school safety teams that involve students.
- Providing crime prevention training for students.
- Forging partnerships with community agencies that enhance school resources and activities.
- Increasing communication among teachers, students, and law enforcement officials.
- Organizing parent-student patrols and safe corridors.
- Legislating drug- and gun-free school zones.
- Sponsoring campuswide cleanups.
- Fostering parent involvement.
- Offering teachers school safety training.
- Creating schoolwide violence prevention curriculums.
- Establishing peer mediation and conflict resolution programs.

Responding to Perpetrators of Violence. Other programs respond to the perpetrators of violence and fear through curriculums that engage bullies, gang members, and violent students in learning anger management, conflict resolution, resistance to peer pressure, and appreciation of diversity. A number of communities have implemented victim/offender programs that require juvenile offenders to make restitution to victims for damage or losses incurred or to perform community services. Others have established crisis intervention teams that help students cope with troubling violent incidents in and around school.

Under a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the University of South Carolina is testing a violence prevention program among rural youth in six South Carolina school districts that, in part, focuses on bullying. The program encourages teachers to set firm limits for unacceptable behavior and to observe and monitor student activities including lunch and break times. School staff are trained to intervene quickly when students break the rules and respond with consistent sanctions. At the same time, staff reinforce socially acceptable behavior by acknowledging, praising, and recognizing students who follow school rules and demonstrate socially acceptable behavior. The program is based on a successful model in Norway that led to a 50-percent drop in bullying incidences within 2 years of implementation. The program also decreased truancy, vandalism, theft, and alcohol consumption and improved student attitudes toward school.

M. Donnelly, "Nobody Likes a Bully," *South Carolina Family Futures* 1 (March 1996), 1, 6–7.

Many jurisdictions also focus on fear related to gang violence. They employ strategies that include teams of community volunteers, school officials, and youth-service providers. Working together, they conduct special outreach programs to juvenile gang members designed to reduce gang threats, recruitment, and revenge; remove gang graffiti in and near the school campus; control campus access; provide afterschool programs; and establish comprehensive dress codes or uniform policies that eliminate gang signs and colors from the school environment.

Targeting Weapons. These program strategies include antiweapon campaigns that increase student engagement with school officials, anonymous hotlines for reporting weapons and other criminal activity, school resource officers, locker searches, and clear school policies and discipline codes. The majority of weapon reduction programs involve curriculums that emphasize the prevention of weapon misuse, the risks involved with the possession of a firearm, and the need for learning conflict resolution and anger management skills. Programs often use videotapes showing the tragic results of gun violence and may also include firearm safety instruction, public information campaigns, counseling programs, partnerships with hospital emergency rooms, and crisis intervention hotlines.

In 1994, officials in Tucson, Arizona, developed Firearms Awareness and Safety Training (FAST) to provide an intermediate sanction short of adjudication and incarceration for juveniles—generally first-time offenders—cited for minor firearms offenses. A multiagency program staffed by volunteer law enforcement and justice system professionals, FAST is a 1-day educational course in gun laws, safety rules, gun storage responsibility, and firearms accidents. Those diverted into FAST may choose to participate or face a court hearing. Parents must attend with their children. The underlying theme is that both juveniles and parents are responsible for their actions and decisions. Since its inception, FAST has served 153 juveniles, only 1 of whom has reappeared in juvenile court on a subsequent firearms violation. Although further evaluation is warranted, initial results demonstrate that youth referred to FAST reoffend at a lower rate than overall rates for arrested juveniles.

Richard Wood and Steve Ballance, *The FAST Program Evaluation Report 1994–1996* (Tucson, Arizona, Pima County Juvenile Court Center, 1996).

Truants

Problem Summary

Across the Nation many children as young as elementary school age are staying away from school for a variety of reasons. Some are slow learners; some lack personal and educational goals because of an absence of academic challenge; some fear violence; and some have parents who are guilty of "educational neglect." With daily absentee rates as high as 30 percent in some cities, it is not surprising that truancy is listed among the major problems facing schools. The statistics speak volumes.

- In New York City, the Nation's largest school system, about 150,000 of its 1 million public school students are absent on a typical day.[1]
- The Los Angeles Unified School District, the Nation's second largest district, reports that an average of 62,000 students (10 percent of its enrollment) are out of school each day.[2]
- In Detroit, 40 public school attendance officers investigated 66,440 chronic absenteeism complaints during the 1994–95 school year.[3]

The impact of truancy extends beyond the loss of educational opportunity. Many police departments report that daytime crime rates are rising, in part because some students who are not in school are busy committing crimes such as burglaries, vandalizing cars, shoplifting, and scrawling graffiti on signs and office buildings. When police in Van Nuys, California, conducted a 3-week-long school truancy sweep, shoplifting arrests fell 60 percent.[4] Police in St. Paul, Minnesota, reported that crimes such as purse snatching dropped almost 50 percent after police began picking up truants and taking them to a new school attendance center.[5]

Truancy has become such a significant problem that some cities are now passing ordinances allowing police to issue a citation to either the parent or the truant, which can result in a $500 fine or 30 days in jail for the parent and suspension of the youth's license to drive.[6] In addition to fining parents, courts can order them to attend parenting classes and hold them in contempt of court. In some

"There are many things we can do that are far more cost-effective than waiting for the crisis of delinquency or crime to occur. . . . Truancy prevention programs should be developed in every elementary school so that at the first sign of truancy, police, social service agencies, and the school join together to identify the cause and do something about it before it is too late."

— Attorney General Janet Reno

"National Agenda for Children: On the Front Lines With Attorney General Janet Reno," *Juvenile Justice* (Fall/Winter 1993), 2–3.

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cases the court may take a child away from a parent and make the child a ward of the court.[29]

Promising Approaches

Team Approaches. Schools are joining with district attorneys' offices and law enforcement, social services, and community agencies in their attempts to address truancy. This team approach focuses on both the parents and child. It determines what issues (educational, health, economic, psychological, behavioral) are contributing to the child's truancy. The team addresses the identified needs and gives a clear message on school attendance to the parents and the child. If these efforts do not result in regular school attendance, the team refers the case to the district attorney's office for a hearing. Reports indicate that in many instances this approach is working. In cases where truancy persists, the district attorney's office will refer the student, the parents, or both to court. Court dispositions may include counseling on communication, conflict resolution education, parenting skills, and community service or a fine.

Truancy Centers. Centers dedicated to truancy reduction are being established across the country as a tool that school, law enforcement agencies, and community organizations can use to address their truancy problems. Boys and Girls Clubs and other youth-serving organizations are making their facilities available to schools to support truancy center programs. Jurisdictions are giving police officers authority to stop and question youth who are in the community during school hours. Police take those youth who do not have a legitimate excuse for being absent from school to a truancy center, where professionals assess the family situation to determine what family-based or other services may be needed and whether followup may be required. The center contacts the school and either releases the child to a parent or guardian or transfers the child to an alternative facility pending release. In order to return to school, the student must be accompanied by his or her parent or guardian.

Community Assessment Centers. Sometimes referred to as juvenile assessment centers, the community assessment center concept is being adopted by jurisdictions to comprehensively address the needs of at-risk and delinquent youth. Assessment centers combine the efforts of law enforcement with social service and mental health agencies to bring needed services to juveniles who commit first-time, minor, or status offenses, including truancy. Based on an assessment provided by a multidisciplinary team housed at the assessment center, services are provided in a timely and comprehensive manner. This comprehensive and immediate intervention is designed to help prevent repeat offending.

Alternative Schools. Many truants benefit from the smaller classes, higher teacher-to-student ratio, and more hands-on learning found in an alternative school setting. (For a fuller discussion of alternative schools, see p. 6.)

The Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS) program was established in 1993 to address truancy and juvenile crime in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. TABS is a collaborative effort of the Milwaukee County sheriff's office, police department, and public schools and the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee. Law enforcement officers pick up juveniles who are in the community during school hours without an excused absence and take them to TABS centers at the Boys and Girls Clubs. Center staff process the truants and contact the parents. The parents and the student work with the school counselor to set goals for regular school attendance. If social services are needed, the counselor arranges them and any followup conferences. For chronic truants, police may issue citations to the parents and require the student to participate in counseling and diversion programs. For 1993–94, the police department's evaluation of TABS shows that as student attendance improved over a 30-day tracking period, daytime juvenile crime rates declined. Violent juvenile crime was significantly reduced: homicides by 43 percent; sexual assaults, 24 percent; robberies, 16 percent; and aggravated assaults, 24 percent. Nonviolent crimes were down also, but not as significantly. In 1994–95, daytime juvenile crime declined even further in all areas except homicide.

Community Health Concepts, *We're Keeping TABS on Truants* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: August 1995), 3–4.

Suspended and Expelled Students

Problem Summary

Weapons possession, substance abuse, disruptive behavior, assaults on school staff and students, and criminal acts committed outside school are five reasons schools are removing increasing numbers of students from the educational mainstream.

- Wisconsin schools expelled about 70 percent more students in 1993–94 than in the previous school year.[30]
- By the end of the 1993–94 school year, Colorado's public schools recorded 65,547 suspensions, some students having been suspended more than once.[31]
- One Oregon school district expelled nearly one student per day during the first 3 months of the 1994–95 school year after enacting a zero tolerance policy on weapons.[32]
- During the 1993–94 academic year, a record 17,046 violent incidents plagued the New York City schools. More than 4,000 teachers were assaulted, and 7,254 weapons were confiscated. According to the New York Board of Education, 150 students were caught with firearms.[33]

Under the Improving America's Schools Act, in order to receive Title I funds from the U.S. Department of Education, a State must have a law "... requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought a weapon to school," except that the local chief administrative officer may modify the expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis.[34] As a result, school districts are increasingly ordering 1-year expulsions for students who bring weapons to school, spawning a large number of students ranging from elementary to high school age who must be dealt with in alternative schools, in the juvenile justice system, or on the streets. Schools and communities must face the problem of how suspended and expelled students can continue to receive an education and what kind of academic setting should be provided for them.

Promising Approaches

In-School Suspensions. Typically, disruptive students are suspended from school and placed under parental supervision for the duration of their out-of-school suspension. Students, however, often lack oversight due to parents' work schedules, repeat the same disruptive behaviors in the home and community, and miss homework assignments. Schools

also lose Average Daily Attendance income. These factors created the need to alter the out-of-school suspension policy for many school districts. They concluded that disruptive students need a structured environment to help them change their behavior while staying focused on their education. In-school suspensions are one answer these school districts have chosen to address the problem of disruptive student behavior. Students with chronic discipline problems are removed from their regular classroom and placed in a highly structured environment, generally with no more than 15 students, for a specified period of time. These in-school suspension programs provide academic and counseling components, including a range of individually designed learning modules and computer tutorial programs developed to promote success in the classroom; a counseling program based on an assessment of identified needs; an interpersonal training program to develop coping and communication skills; and conflict resolution and law-related education programs. A community service component is included in many programs to help build self-esteem through helping the less fortunate while developing socially acceptable behaviors and attitudes.

Alternative Schools. Many school districts have chosen alternative schools to provide academic instruction to students expelled for such offenses as weapons possession; suspended from their regular school for a variety of reasons, including disruptive behavior; or unable to succeed in the mainstream school environment. Alternative schools come in all sizes and settings, from space in a large department store, community center, or empty office building to a portable structure. More important than location is what alternative schools offer these troubled youth. For many, an alternative school presents and reinforces the message that students are accountable for their actions. At the alternative school, they receive an assessment of their academic and social abilities and skills, are assigned to a program that allows them to succeed while challenging them to reach higher goals, and receive assistance through small group and individualized instruction and counseling sessions. In addition, students and their families may receive an assessment to determine if social services such as healthcare, parenting classes, and other program services are indicated.

To help students return to their regular schools, alternative schools develop individualized student plans. For many students, however, returning to a setting where they failed is not an attractive option. Many students want to remain in the alternative school, and some school districts permit this. Often, those who do remain in the alternative school are allowed to graduate with their mainstream school classmates. Alternative schools that succeed with this population of youth typically have the following elements:

- Strong leadership.
- Lower student-to-staff ratio.
- Carefully selected personnel.
- Early identification of student risk factors and problem behaviors.
- Intensive counseling/mentoring.
- Prosocial skills training.
- Strict behavior requirements.
- Curriculum based on real life learning.
- Emphasis on parental involvement.
- Districtwide support of the programs.[34]

Many alternative schools also have a strong community service component that helps students recognize their responsibility to their community and others while gaining self-esteem for their contributions.

The Barron Assessment and Counseling Center is a promising project of the Boston public school system. If a student is found to have had a weapon on school property, he or she is charged under the disciplinary code. The parents are contacted, and the school principal or superintendent conducts a hearing. If the charges are warranted, the student is immediately referred to the center. At the center, students (elementary through high school) receive academic, psychological, and social assessments and crisis intervention counseling. Staff prepare individualized service delivery plans for each client. The students continue to receive assignments from school. The program has an aftercare component to continue services to the youth after release from the center. Although outside evaluation has not yet been completed, internal evaluation indicates a recidivism rate of 5 percent for first-time offenders from 1987 to 1993. Northeastern University School of Law, the Office of Emergency Medical Services, and Vietnam Veterans Against Violence provide special workshops to teach these youth alternatives to violence. This program is coordinated with the juvenile court, the juvenile probation department, and the Departments of Youth Services, Social Services, and Mental Health.

Reducing Youth Gun Violence: An Overview of Programs and Initiatives (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, May 1996), 26.

Students Being Reintegrated From the Juvenile Justice System

Problem Summary

More than 500,000 delinquency cases disposed each year by juvenile courts result in court orders allowing the juvenile offender to remain in the community on probation—or return to the community following a residential placement—and continue normal activities such as school and work.[35] Regular school attendance and community service often are conditions of these orders.

For the vast majority of children on probation or in aftercare, educational success is critical to preventing recidivism and further involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Yet meeting the educational needs of youth on probation or in aftercare status has proven to be a particularly difficult problem. Institutional resistance and barriers between the educational and justice systems often result in a lack of advance planning and coordination that further exacerbates the problem. Juvenile offenders may arrive at a school without advance notice, institutional scholastic documentation, or a reintegration plan. Further, these youth frequently face parents who have given up on them, teachers and fellow students who fear them, and citizens who do not want them in the community.

Promising Approaches

Programs that focus on the population of court-involved youth tend to fall into three categories: (1) model learning environments that enhance the juvenile's education within a detention or alternative

placement setting, (2) prerelease strategies that support linkages between juvenile justice and school agencies, and (3) transitional settings that ensure the juvenile's smooth reentry into a mainstream or alternative school setting.

Model Learning Environments. These learning environments for detained and incarcerated youth encompass the philosophy that education should be the centerpiece of each juvenile's institutional experience. Facility staff consider themselves teachers and regard every contact with a youth as a teaching opportunity. This model expands learning beyond classroom activity into the spectrum of the institutional experience—including individual and family counseling, treatment, and development of conflict resolution skills—and trains and empowers staff to teach and make learning enjoyable. Educational programs deal with the problem of learning disabilities, which have been identified as an important risk factor contributing to school failure and entry into the juvenile justice system. Model correctional learning centers are places where residents, their families, and staff are all learners and where youth are equipped with knowledge and skills to live productively.

Prerelease Strategies. These strategies are critical for supporting the juvenile's transition from the juvenile justice system into the community. A cluster group composed of multiple agencies (mental health, social service, probation, child protection, and education) can provide services or treatment for a family. The group meets on a regular basis to share information and provide integrated services. A school representative (principal, social worker, counselor, or homeroom teacher) typically chairs the cluster group, and all group members provide information related to the child that is shared with other cluster members. Placement considerations and discussions with regular school officials begin well before the student is scheduled to leave residential care. Juvenile justice officials share information on the therapeutic needs, academic functioning, educational goals, and aftercare conditions with the school. A key factor in easing the reintegration process is a visit by the student to the school prior to release.[37]

Transitional Settings. Several approaches can be used to help a juvenile move smoothly back into school from a correctional facility.

Alternative schools. An alternative school facility may provide an appropriate interim placement for a juvenile exiting a detention facility or a residential placement. An alternative setting reduces the risk that a child will be lost in the system without needed support services. Such a setting provides an appropriate environment in which to incrementally reduce the level of attention and structure the student has required and is accustomed to receiving.

Short-term enrollment. This approach can be used in transitioning a juvenile from a more restrictive alternative school into a regular or less restrictive alternative school setting. This may be complemented with a student admission interview; a review of policies and procedures; a clear explanation of a zero tolerance policy within the school environment for substance abuse or other delinquent behaviors; a violence elimination contract; parent notification of accountability; assignment of cluster or interagency representatives; and identification of target academic, behavioral, and vocational goals.

Restorative justice model. As the offender moves into the education mainstream, it may be appropriate to tailor the curriculum to the juvenile offender, thereby addressing the needs of the student and the community. For example, under the restorative justice model, the offender may be required to pay restitution for damages inflicted upon the victim and to pursue a personalized educational plan. This plan helps the student complete educational and vocational goals and may provide school credit for community service projects.

Probation officers on campus/law-related education. Other program approaches include (1) placing probation officers on campus to provide intensive supervision for students who are on probation or parole, or (2) implementing a law-related education curriculum. A prime purpose of these programs is to help prevent the returning juvenile from engaging—or reengaging—in delinquent activity, including gang behavior. Involvement with gangs appears to be common with many juvenile offenders, especially those juvenile offenders leaving institutional care. Whether these juveniles are actually members of a gang or "wannabe" members, the potential gang influence is a reality. Gang influences can seriously undermine the effectiveness of educational programs that assist the juvenile offender. Therefore, schools should also develop strategies to combat the presence of gangs in the community and the school.

School-to-work programs. These programs emphasize the connection between the classroom and the work setting. Students have an agenda that

Studies have shown that youth who are learning disabled are very likely to drop out of school rather than face the ridicule of their peers for their school failure. Research has also shown that a strong relationship exists between learning disabilities and delinquency. In the eyes of many students with learning disabilities—and in the eyes of some of their peers, it may be better to be a delinquent than to be labeled the "class dummy." A 1993 report of the King County Juvenile Detention Special Education Project in Seattle, Washington, disclosed some interesting data. Fifty percent of the 1,700 detained youth in the project were in special education classes and, of those youth, 48 percent were identified as learning disabled.[38]

To better address the needs of these youth, greater attention needs to be paid at a much younger age to the nature of learning disabilities, their impact on learning and the processing of information in the classroom setting, and their relationship to dropping out and delinquency. Parents, schools, and the juvenile courts need to be more aware of this "hidden handicap." Many youth who choose delinquency over failure in school could be helped if their disabilities were properly diagnosed and treated early enough in their school careers. Those professions that directly interact with the learning disabled need to share their knowledge and information on how best to identify and treat learning disabilities. This could lead to a significant reduction in the number of delinquents who are learning disabled and keep more children in the education mainstream.

The Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC) Education System operates three secure care schools for adjudicated youth: Adobe Mountain School (located in Phoenix) and Catalina Mountain School (located in Tucson) serve male youth, and Black Canyon School (located in Phoenix) serves both male and female youth. The ADJC Education System is accredited and provides the Success School alternative education program to transition students from secure care to the appropriate public school or work environment. Youth (85 percent male and 15 percent female) between the ages of 12 and 17 who come to the program are behind academically by 2 to 3 years. As a result of their participation in this program, they score an average of 40 percent higher on tests of reading, writing, and math than they had previously.

Success School is the result of research on Effective Schools; the Coalition of Essential Schools methodology; Total Quality Management techniques; and Outcome-Based Education strategies. Students are served by multidisciplinary teams of teachers and receive a full vocational and social skills assessment, standardized testing, and appropriate placement. Once released, those students who are unable to return to their school districts of residence attend Charter Success Schools located in the community. The community transition component of Success Schools allows for a systemic implementation of effective educational practices, and ultimately for a juvenile's educational success.

A. Wright, "Success Guaranteed: The Pathfinder Project," *Preventing School Failure* 40 (2) (Winter 1996), 67, 70–71.

Communities In Schools, Inc. (formerly Cities In Schools, Inc.) (CIS) is the Nation's largest stay-in-school network. Funded in part by OJJDP, CIS works to connect a community's existing health, education, and human resources with students and their families. CIS emphasizes four basic principles: Every child needs and deserves a personal one-on-one relationship with a caring adult, a safe place to learn and grow, a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and a chance to give back to peers and community.

A report of outcome data on CIS students for 1992–1993 indicated significant success in keeping students in school and increasing their performance. A longitudinal study found that by 1993 nearly 80 percent were still in school. In addition, 70 percent of students with high absenteeism prior to entering CIS improved their attendance, and 60 percent of students with unsatisfactory grade point averages improved their averages in the year in which they joined CIS.

S.B. Rossman and E. Morley, *The National Evaluation of Cities In Schools: Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, April 1995), 81, 84.

includes academic subjects and goal setting, management, problem solving, and conflict resolution education. These life skills are incorporated into the programming to reflect real world contexts such as thinking creatively and working in teams to achieve a common goal. To be effective, the school setting must provide structure, and teachers, counselors, and administrators must document student behavior and progress toward program completion. Appropriate individualization is required for each student. A hierarchy that provides the kind of structure and consistency often associated with residential facility "programming" is helpful in assisting the student to acquire skills for reentry into a regular education setting.

For each of these approaches, it is important to remember that the impact of the family on the emotional and academic well-being of the juvenile is crucial. If the family is not functional, then the risk for academic failure and further justice system involvement is significantly increased. Consequently, schools must assist in educating families and helping families obtain necessary services.

Dropouts

Problem Summary

Dropouts quit school for a number of reasons: academic problems, difficulties with other students, boredom, employment, teenage pregnancy, lack of parental concern, difficulties at home, and expulsion because of discipline problems.[9]

Dropout rates not only affect individual students' lives negatively but can also, as indicated earlier, have a broader impact on the economy because "dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed and on welfare."[10]

Promising Approaches

Schools with low dropout rates share common factors: relatively small size; extensive one-on-one work with students; teaching methods that draw students into the learning process; and teachers, staff, and parents who are personally involved with helping students learn. Through these approaches, they create a bond between students and the school environment that keeps students enrolled and involved in "their" school.

School-to-Work Programs. Schools and communities need to view the dropout problem from both prevention and intervention perspectives. Two similar but different approaches are needed to help keep youth at risk from dropping out of school and to provide programs to bring those youth who have dropped out of school back to complete their education requirements and graduate or earn a general equivalency diploma. Intervention approaches can use alternative schools or develop ties to the business community to provide academic and job training that addresses the needs and interests of the student. These school-to-work programs provide students not only with their high school diploma but also a certificate of achievement for learning a skill or trade that helps them gain entry to employment after high school.

Career Academy Programs. Some schools implement career academy programs that allow students to choose a professional track such as emergency services, law and justice, nursing and medical care, computer technology, and other professional fields. The key feature of these dropout programs is their ability to place the academic process into a context that provides on-the-job experience, experiential learning, future employment opportunities, career options, or advancement to higher education programs. Also, many of the same features of successful alternative school programs are provided

by successful dropout prevention and intervention programs, particularly lower student-to-staff ratio, districtwide support, intensive counseling/mentoring, strict behavior requirements, and a curriculum based on real life learning.

Overview of YOEM Initiative Activities

As noted, the Departments of Education and Justice have provided a grant to the National School Safety Center (NSSC) to implement the YOEM initiative. NSSC is working with communities to expand, share, and use information on effective ways to address school safety and student fear, truancy, suspensions and expulsions, dropouts, and reintegration. Several activities have been designed and implemented to further the goals of the initiative.

Kickoff Meeting

A meeting was held in Boston, Massachusetts, in May 1996 at the John F. Kennedy Library to announce the YOEM initiative and raise public awareness of this critical issue. More than 325 representatives from the juvenile justice system, law enforcement, education, business/corporate community, foundations and associations, social services, youth-serving agencies, and other related fields attended the 1-day meeting to share their concerns, experiences, and commitment to addressing this population of youth. Attorney General Janet Reno's message to the participants challenged them to form collaborative, community partnerships to attract and welcome youth back into the mainstream of American education.

Public Information Forums

Four YOEM information forums were held during the summer of 1996 at regional sites (two in Federal Empowerment Zones and two in Federal Enterprise Communities) to showcase information on effective and promising programs that address the problem of youth out of the education mainstream. The sites and dates of the forums were Detroit, Michigan (July 12); Los Angeles, California (July 31); Charlotte, North Carolina (August 16); and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (August 26). Nearly 1,000 representatives from educational institutions, probation departments, correctional facilities, law enforcement agencies, juvenile courts, youth-serving organizations, and community groups attended the forums. At the regional forums, speakers identified the school-related risk factors in the lives of these youth, provided the latest information on promising and proven methods to address these risk factors, and showcased innovative and collaborative partnerships and comprehensive programs that are meeting the needs of youth at risk in our schools and communities.

Training and Technical Assistance

Beginning in late fall of 1996, following a competitive selection process, NSSC began providing individualized training and technical assistance to 10 competitively selected jurisdictions to assist school districts, juvenile and family courts, social service agencies, community organizations, and other service providers to develop new programs or enhance existing programs that comprehensively address the needs of youth out of the education mainstream. Of the 10 sites, 6 are located in Federal Enterprise Zones, Empowerment Communities, and Enhanced Empowerment Communities. The 10 sites are: San Jose, CA; Las Vegas, NV; Hastings, NE; Washington, DC; Reading, PA; Essex County, NJ; Macon, GA; Louisville, KY; Hennepin County, MN; and Phoenix, AZ.

The training component will assist these jurisdictions in the following manner:

- Further assess the problem, as needed, and identify community strengths and resources.
- Share information on effective and promising intervention techniques.
- Enhance the role of educators, juvenile justice personnel, community leaders, youth-serving groups, and the business community in program formulation and implementation.
- Identify methods of working across agencies to develop and implement effective programs.

Publication

A comprehensive publication will be made available on the YOEM initiative and will include a directory of effective and promising programs, a list of resource organizations, recommended reading, and Federal, State, and local resources available to assist in meeting the needs of youth out of the education mainstream.

Conclusion

The untapped potential of our Nation's young people must not be neglected. Innovative, promising, and effective approaches are available to prevent crime and delinquency and nurture each child's potential to become a successful and contributing member of society. Each young person deserves the opportunity to demonstrate that he or she is capable of success.

The YOEM initiative is expected to demonstrate that we can stem the tide of children leaving the education mainstream and that many of the youth who have fallen out of the education mainstream can be saved from falling out of the mainstream of society. It is hoped that these youth will be able to experience the personal success of completing a homework assignment, passing a test, helping another student with a science project, avoiding a fight, giving back to their community through service, and earning a high school or general equivalency diploma that will prepare them for a successful future.

Resources

Publications available from the U.S. Department of Education's Clearinghouse (800–624–0100)

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